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CLARENCE THOMAS OF ILWU LOCAL 10, PCPA
PART 2 OF 3

INTERVIEWEE: CLARENCE THOMAS

INTERVIEWER: HARVEY SCHWARTZ

SUBJECTS: BLACK LONGSHORE WORKERS; ILWU LOCAL 10; COALITION FOR AN ACCOUNTABLE PORT; AFL-CIO; PERMISSIVE RULE; MILLION MAN MARCH; ILWU DRILL TEAM; MILLION WORKER MARCH; MILLIONS MORE MARCH; OCCUPY; BLACK RADICAL TRADITION; HARRY BRIDGES; RON DELLUMS; LEO ROBINSON

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY:** One correction from last time is that the opening portrait is actually from 2020, not from 2016.

[00:01:07] **CLARENCE:** That is correct.

[00:01:08] **HARVEY:** Clarence had pointed that out. Clarence, last time, we were discussing things after the official recording was stopped, and you mentioned a story about Bill Watkins and Jack Heyman.

[00:01:26] **CLARENCE:** Let me put it to you this way. It's sort of foggy in my mind about what happened, but essentially, what it had to do with was both Jack and I were ruled to be ineligible off of the ballot. These things are always highly political. It had something to do, I think, with signatures. We have to have like 50 signatures of members who are in good standing in order to be placed on the ballot.

[00:02:08] I think it had something to do with that, but the point of it was that Jack and I were both vying to get on the ballot. We were both declared to be ineligible, which we both were. I think we may have even appealed it to the International. It's kinda foggy.

[00:02:29] I just remember some of the dialog that went on at the Executive Board meeting. Jack was pointing out that he and Bill had ideological differences. It got kind of personal. It wound up whereas Bill was conceding that they did, but he said, "Hey, I don't have any animosity against Clarence."

[00:02:59] The bottom line was we both were kept off the ballot, but I kind of think that Bill was trying to make a point that he didn't have any grudges to grind with me, but I was kept off the ballot. It wasn't a matter of politics was the point that Bill was trying to make.

[00:03:16] But at the time, I thought it was ironic because we both were kept off of the ballot, but I guess it was just Bill's way of letting Jack know that "Hey, I wasn't trying to play any favorites, because Clarence is somebody who I like, and he's off the ballot as well." That was the gist of it.

[00:03:37] **HARVEY:** Do you remember what year that was?

[00:03:42] **CLARENCE:** It's really hard to say. I would think it must have been . . . it was after I had served in office as the secretary-treasurer, so it must have been maybe 2003 or 2004.

[00:03:59] I don't know. It's just that certain things occur to you and you think about it and you think, yeah, I remember that. Because we were talking about Bill.

[00:04:07] **HARVEY:** Yeah. What was the charge that these guys brought?

[00:04:15] **CLARENCE:** It had to do with being able to qualify to be on the ballot. They didn't bring any charges, but when you are kept off of the ballot, normally what it means is that you didn't have the correct number of signatures. You have to have 50 signatures of members who are in good standing. That can be an issue.

[00:04:40] I don't think that we turned in our ballots late. I don't believe that was the issue. Maybe I should have discussed it with Jack to get his take on why we were kept off the ballot, but we both were. I just think that I remember Bill was making a point that he didn't have any—he was basically saying that, "Hey, Clarence was kept off the ballot and I don't have any political ax to grind with him. You both are off." It was like that kind of thing.

[00:05:18] I don't know why it popped into my head, but I guess at the time, I just thought about it because of my recollections of Bill Watkins—who was a long-time member of the caucus and a convention delegate, on the Executive Board, officeholder—was secretary-treasurer for many, many years.

[00:05:44] Jolita Lewis was the first woman—and African American, which I mentioned before—who was elected to that position. She was supported significantly by Leo Robinson, who we're going to discuss in more detail later.

[00:06:03] Jolita was the first woman, and the first African American woman on top of that, and a very able person. Wasn't as political as some of the other people, even myself. She didn't particularly care to be that. She wasn't involved in political activities other than being a very able administrator.

[00:06:31] She was able to demonstrate that people who had come into the union—when the women started coming in in large, significant numbers after 1989—when I first came on the waterfront, I think there was a handful of women who worked on the waterfront, and all of those women came in through the Permissive Rule, like myself.

[00:07:02] But Jolita was a major breakthrough. I can also remember Rosa Tyner. She was the first Black woman to be elected dispatcher. She was John Lewis's sister, the former member of Congress. She died a couple of years ago. I remember these people, these figures. I followed Jolita Lewis, so I defeated Bill Watkins. That took place in 2001. That's when I won my election.

[00:07:43] But I would like to go back to the 1990s, if I can, because there's some things that I think are important for me to say for those who will be watching this. That is that it should be very clear that in terms of how people view my activities in Local 10, I'm out of the Black radical tradition of labor.

[00:08:15] As a matter of fact, I'm going to be participating in an event at the University of Washington on January 13. It's a conference dedicated to the memory of Jack Hunter O'Dell, who was the first, I believe, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was forced to step down because President Kennedy told Dr. Martin Luther King that he could not have a person a part of that group who was formerly a member of the Communist Party. As a result of that, O'Dell had to step down.

[00:08:58] I'm mentioning that because I'm going to be discussing the Black radical tradition at Local 10. I just think people should know that I come out of that kind of tradition. It's important for me to say that because I wanted to start talking about 1995.

[00:09:17] I became active in terms of getting on the Executive Board and the Board of Trustees around the early 90s. Took me a while to get involved with it. I went to union meetings. Wasn't certain that I wanted to get involved in the politics of Local 10. The politics of Local 10, I would imagine, is much like that at other ILWU locals up and down the coast. We have a bottom-up, not top-down tradition.

[00:09:53] Democracy can be very challenging. There's a microphone that sits right in front of the stage on the podium at Local 10 meetings. I've been to other meetings and I've seen this same kind of a set-up. Rank-and-filers can go and get up and speak. But it took me a while before I made my mind up that I wanted to get involved.

[00:10:14] But I think that the 1990s were very pivotal for me. In 1995, there was something very significant that took place. It was called the Million Man March. It was called by the Nation of Islam. Because Local 10 is a predominantly African American longshore local—as a matter of fact, it is the only predominantly African

American longshore local on the West Coast—there was a great deal of excitement about this. It's important to note that the longshore caucus voted to endorse the intent and purpose of the Million Man March in 1995.

[00:11:05] I'm mentioning this because as it turned out—and a lot of people don't view it this way—I don't hear very many people on the left or labor discussing it in the way I'm going to describe it right now—it really was one of the largest demonstrations of Black working-class men in the history of the United States.

[00:11:27] We can remember, there was a lot of discussion about how many people were there. Believe me, I was there. It was well over a million and a half people at that event. I've never been to anything quite like this. There was a delegation of us that went because—

[00:11:45] **HARVEY:** Conor, can you show picture number five?

[00:11:49] **CLARENCE:** Yes! Yes! Thank you, Harvey.

[00:11:58] **CONOR:** This was the one from 2005 you want to see? Is that right?

[00:12:01] **HARVEY:** 95, picture five.

[00:12:08] **CLARENCE:** There's one picture five that has some very distinguished ILWU Local 10 members, like Andrew Delaney, Leo Robinson—yeah, to the left—Philip Alley, Frank Jefferson, Clarence Thomas, of course, David Stewart, Howard Secrease.

[00:12:28] The people who are still alive are Howard Secrease, myself, Frank Jefferson. We're still here. The other fellows are no longer here. Thank you for showing that, Harvey. We weren't the only ILWU members present, but this was the group that I traveled with.

[00:12:59] I think that we really didn't have any idea what it was going to be like, but we knew that with a gathering like this, of Black people, we needed to have a presence there. That was very important, and that's the reason why I went.

[00:13:16] I wrote an article about that particular event. It appeared in The Dispatcher in 1995. I believe it was in November of 1995.

[00:13:31] There was a woman, Harvey—and you probably can refresh my recollection—who was the editor of the paper at that time. I can't remember her name.

[00:13:44] **HARVEY:** Oh, yeah, I know who you mean.

[00:13:45] **CLARENCE:** You know who I'm talking about.

[00:13:47] **HARVEY:** Yes. I can't come up with it either.

[00:13:52] **CLARENCE:** Anyway, I wrote an article, and then she framed it. She signed it off by saying that I was one in a million. I really felt proud of that.

[00:14:09] One of the reasons why I'm mentioning this is because, like I said, my wife, Delores [Lemon-Thomas] , did something very interesting. She also went to the march with me. She did something very interesting. She went to Union Station, and during the course of the day, as people were arriving at the march, she was videotaping people getting off.

[00:14:31] She would ask them, "Where are you from?" They'd say, "Oh, I'm from Baltimore. I'm a longshoreman." She'd say, "Oh, my husband is from San Francisco. What do you do?" "I'm a winch driver." She has those videos, too, of people from all over the country—teachers, bus drivers, rail workers, building trades, and a host of things. You had trade unionists from all over the country—from SEIU, the Teamsters.

[00:15:02] But one of the more ironic things about that was that there was no organized labor contingents speaking at that event. But all of that changed 10 years later with the 10-year anniversary, and we'll get to that later.

[00:15:19] But 1995, I thought that was a very important time. It was important that we be there, not really knowing what it was going to be like. I was glad that I was there.

[00:15:32] It was really something to behold because I can remember—this is worth saying—I can remember my maternal grandmother, who was married to a longshoreman, on the eve of the march, I gave her a call. I was telling her how there was a tremendous amount of media at the event, but what was interesting is that the media that we saw representing CNN, Fox News—you didn't see any white media people. It was all Black people who were representing those various entities.

[00:16:13] I can remember discussing with my grandmother the excitement and all, and I remember her telling me this. She said she was very concerned that something bad was going to happen. She was speaking from her experience as an African American woman. She was born, I believe, in Texas—she lived in Port Arthur, Texas—and she could just remember things that happened to Black folks. She was so afraid that something bad was going to take place and was so afraid that there was going to be some kind of an incident, and it was all based on her historical perspective.

[00:16:56] Fortunately, nothing like that happened. There was a great deal of camaraderie. You had such a cross-section of Black folk. But it was a major, major demonstration of Black solidarity, and I was glad I was there. That's one thing I wanted to mention.

[00:17:13] But fast forward to 1999. I got injured on the waterfront. I tore my meniscus. I was off from work for a year. But something very interesting happened during that time. The Port of Oakland had what they call—you may remember this, Harvey—the Vision 2000 program. What it was, you remember the Navy base closed down and the Port was expanded—Berth 55, 56, 57, 58, all of that—and then the Middle Harbor Shoreline Park was constructed. All that.

[00:17:58] The community and labor put together an organization called Coalition for an Accountable Port to make sure that the construction jobs were going to be done by the building trades. There was this joint intermodal terminal, which was Burlington Northern Santa Fe. That's who operates this. We wanted to make

sure that there was an organized labor force in there. ILWU was interested in getting that work. It wound up going to the Teamsters, which was disappointing.

[00:18:37] But this is the point I wanted to talk about. Joe Ibarra, who was the secretary-treasurer of the ILWU, was like the header-upper of our contingent or delegation to this Coalition for an Accountable Port, which was made up of the Teamsters, SEIU, the Alameda County Building Trades, community organizations, environmental groups—we were all together on this.

[00:19:08] But one of the remarkable things that took place was that in order to get the community's buy-in for this expansion, there had to be some things that were going to be important for them. The ILWU Local 10 and the PMA agreed that 10 percent of all of the hires emanating from this port expansion in 1999 would come from the communities in Oakland and San Francisco that were impacted by port traffic and all this sort of thing.

[00:19:46] So, West Oakland, which is where the Port of Oakland is located, and the Fruitvale, which is where Ninth Avenue used to be—we don't have Ninth Avenue anymore, but we used to do a lot of steelwork—that's more in the Fruitvale area. PMA and Local 10 agreed that 10 percent of all those hires would come from those two communities and the Bayview Hunters Point area in San Francisco.

[00:20:15] I was off from work but I was mobile. I was going to therapy, but I was spending a lot of time working with Lawrence Thibodeaux and Joe trying to capture this work at Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and also to set up these venues where people from West Oakland and the Fruitvale could apply for casual jobs, with the understanding that if you resided in those areas and you wanted to apply for the job, you could not put a card in in the general public pool. In other words, if you lived in West Oakland and you decided that you wanted to try to have your card drawn from those with a certain zip code, you could not put it in the general pool, so you couldn't get two bites at the apple.

[00:21:20] I was very pleased to see that we were able to do that. We had no lawsuits that came out of that. Everything worked out perfectly. I can remember the PMA wanted to take all of the credit because there was like 5,000 people that showed up in Jack London Square applying for these jobs, and they had their chest all out. And we let them. "Okay, you want to take all the credit. Fine. That's okay."

[00:21:52] But I was very glad to be a part of that because it really did symbolize and show me the relationship between the ILWU and the community. We worked with environmental groups. The environmental groups wanted to make sure that Middle Harbor Shoreline Park—it's a beautiful park. I'm sure you've been there, Harvey, over the years.

[00:22:13] **HARVEY:** Yes.

[00:22:13] **CLARENCE:** It's really great. And we were disappointed that we lost work to the Teamsters, but the reality was there was an operation in, I think, Tacoma, where there were rail workers who worked up there, and they were able to—they called them rail ramp workers. It was a separate division of workforce from longshore workers. They were able to capture that work. We were trying to capture it here at the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, but we really hadn't had any experience with that. So, we came in with longshore wages and it was just not competitive with the Teamsters.

[00:22:57] But I thought that the experience of working with the community was remarkable. That's one of the reasons why the ILWU has such a good reputation in the community, because we did more for jobs for people in the community than the building trades did, who made all of these promises that they were going to provide entry-level positions to workers in the community. They did not live up to that. Their words were not backed up with action. ILWU did that. I've talked to a number of people over the years who lived in those communities and got those jobs.

[00:23:42] I can also remember the PMA, when we started to interview people, and the PMA found out that a number of the people who had applied for these jobs had records for drugs—selling drugs, small-level stuff. And because of the fact that they didn't have enough money to fight some of these charges, they took a plea. They didn't go to jail. They got probation.

[00:24:10] So, when these cases came up before the PMA, they started to say, "We can't hire them." I said, "Who do you think you were going to be hiring? You made this big splash, and you did all of this. And furthermore, remember, you're not giving them a job, you're giving them an opportunity to work on the waterfront."

[00:24:30] I remember Henry Graham was the president at that time, and I remember [laughing] Henry saying—we had the caucus—he said, "Clarence, these guys are probably thinking you're Jesse Jackson, the way that you're hammering on them." [laughing] Henry had a way of things. He said, "We're going to go back in there. We ain't backing up at all."

[00:24:57] Fortunately, we were able to get that done. These are some of the things that really stand out in my mind when I think about some of the things. Sometimes, we don't win—we didn't get that work—and it was very disappointing. People were pointing fingers and saying at me and Thibodeaux. "You guys didn't do that."

[00:25:16] Listen, we just could not produce that kind of a proposal. The Teamsters were just cheaper. They paid less to their people. We came in with longshore wages. We were able to find an employer—Pacific Rail Services, if I'm not mistaken—that was willing to go in and put a bid in for the work at the joint intermodal terminal. But they had the ILWU longshore wages package, and that was just not competitive.

[00:25:59] The good news was the building trades did all of the work. There was no non-union people working on that. There was a union workforce that was at the joint intermodal terminal. That was not an on-dock situation, it was a near-dock operation.

[00:26:22] I learned a lot. That's the first time I'd ever worked with Joe Ibarra, and it worked close to the leadership in trying to get something done. We developed a lot of good relationships out of that with the community, especially folks in West Oakland, that led to some very important kinds of coalitions as it relates to things like cleaning up the environment at the port; bringing in cold ironing, where the auxiliary engines are shut off and shoreline power is used so that the smokestack is cut off when the ship comes into port; changing the fuel.

[00:27:10] If you remember, Harvey, we had a program called the Saving Lives campaign. So much of that was an outgrowth of the work that we had done with environmental groups and the Coalition for an Accountable Port later. That's why I wanted to mention this work in 1999. That was a pivotal year.

[00:27:39] I'm just sorry we didn't get the work, but it wasn't anything because Thibodeaux and I didn't do, it was just because the ILWU Local 10 didn't have that component of a workforce. Essentially, what it would have been was a workforce specifically for work in a joint intermodal terminal, a railyard, on a near-dock operation, so that those wages would have to be competitive for the work that you're doing on a near-dock.

[00:28:15] **HARVEY:** Yeah. Clarence, does this have a role in your running for office for secretary-treasurer shortly thereafter?

[00:28:24] **CLARENCE:** I think so. I think that people had a chance to see me doing things, and had a chance to observe. There's a member by the name of A. J. Mitchell, who just celebrated his 90th birthday. A. J. was involved in the CBTU and other things. He wasn't so much out front like Leo and Dave Stewart.

[00:28:49] But he wrote something in my book, which we'll talk about later. He said that when I came into the waterfront, a lot of the old-timers were sort of suspicious of new people, young people. You know what I mean? For one thing, there was not a lot of young people on the waterfront—those who came in through their father's books—and they just have a wait-and-see attitude.

[00:29:16] It was sort of like I used to get these comments. I said, "Why don't you guys vote for different people?" They would say, "Well, we know about this person. We know their track record." And in many instances, the people who they were voting for had done extraordinary work perhaps in their earlier careers, and in the later careers, when young people started to come into the fray, we started to criticize the old ways. "You can do things differently." Leo Robinson and others criticized Harry Bridges when it came time for the negotiations in 1971 about the steadymen. That's just a natural occurrence.

[00:30:01] So, the old-timers, they knew I had been to college, so there was this thing of "Yeah, he thinks he knows everything"—which I did not think that at all. But you have to earn your stripes. People have to be able to see you in action. Writing reports about things that you do, that the union asked you to do. Being able to come before the mic and speak, and people can understand that this guy or this person is willing to get up, they know what they're talking about. We liked getting reports.

[00:30:45] I'll never forget—I may have said this before—that I was admonished by an old-timer when I'd just started working as the secretary-treasurer. I was taking notes, and I have a way of taking copious notes. One of the old-timers said, "Brother Thomas, you don't have to put that in there. We can leave that out. We just want the move, second and carry." [laughing] I kind of smiled, but that was the way that I was. I had those kinds of tendencies.

[00:31:16] So, yeah, there's no doubt about it. I heard old-timers say to me, "Yeah, Leo was touting you to be the next secretary-treasurer," and I hadn't even thought about it. I hadn't even declared that I was going to run, but Leo was encouraging me, and I guess he was telling other old-timers.

[00:31:37] Because Leo Robinson used to say this. "There's two kinds of leadership," in his opinion. "Tested and untested." That was something that he lived by, and he was always interested in finding young people who could step forward to take the place of the members who were active.

[00:32:02] We had an aging workforce, which was one of the reasons why it was 1989, Harvey, which you probably remember, that we got our first group of casuals on the waterfront. I can remember so well there was a big controversy about the casuals because the old-timers were afraid. They're not members. What is this?

[00:32:28] Some people didn't even want them in the hall. I can remember Leo saying, "Hell, no! They're going to be in the hall with us. We have to be able to work with these people and to get them on our side. Because once they're on the job, they're a longshore worker like everybody else. They're just not vested yet. They don't have all of the benefits, they can't vote, and all that kind of stuff."

[00:32:56] To make a long story short, the guys were older, so new leadership was there.

[00:33:09] **HARVEY:** Why did Leo have so much influence?

[00:33:11] **CLARENCE:** I think Leo had a lot of influence because for one thing, Leo was a very bright guy. He did not finish high school. He left high school in the eleventh grade because he told his mother he was hanging out with hoodlums and he wasn't going to graduate. He didn't think he was going to make it, that he might get arrested or whatever the case may be, so she signed up.

[00:33:44] But Leo was a very bright guy, one of the brightest guys I ever met. He said he had a photographic memory at one point, and I believe him, because before I was secretary-treasurer, I used to take notes at the Executive Board meetings—and I took copious notes, like I mentioned before—and I can remember, after the meeting was over, he would mention something. He said, "Did you get that in your notes?" I said, "No, I guess I was too busy taking notes to listen." He never took notes at all. He never took notes, but had a great recall.

[00:34:21] He was a political animal. This guy encouraged me to get involved in the East Bay Legislative Committee. I wasn't particularly interested in doing that work, but he said, "Politicians have a way of making their constituents feel as if they're subordinates. The only time that that dynamic changes for them is when they go out and beg for their vote."

[00:34:51] Leo was saying that we don't kowtow to them at all. Being a part of the East Bay Legislative Committee is also a part of the brilliance of Harry Bridges and the founders to set up this structure of the local, and then you had the Northern California District Council, and then you've got the National. Absolutely brilliant idea in terms of keeping the union engaged in political affairs.

[00:35:22] So, he encouraged me to do that. I wasn't particularly interested, but I was interested, though, Harvey—I think this is important to point out—in things that the ILWU had to offer aside from working on the waterfront, and making a good living.

[00:35:46] I came down on the waterfront at 38 years of age. I wasn't a spring chicken. I wasn't really accustomed to doing a lot of manual labor. I did it when I left college for one year. It's not that I was lazy, but I just found it appealing and interesting to see the various kinds of things that the ILWU was involved in. And there's a place for everybody if you really want to be involved in the union. That was very important to me.

[00:36:22] Leo and my father came into the union at the same time in 1963, but they were a lot different. My father was not as ideological as Leo Robinson was. My father was a strong union man. He loved the union. He went to union meetings. He was a guy who believed and loved the union, but at the same time, when things

weren't right, my father believed in exhausting all of the grievance machinery. But if things weren't going right, he went outside.

[00:36:59] As I had mentioned before, he was a part of that Squire Scott case that had brought a lawsuit against the PMA—Local 34 and Local 10—for the method by which they were denying the rights of longshoremen to transfer into Local 34. They lost that case, but at the outcome of that case, the one-door policy came about.

[00:37:30] That's how my father operated. He wasn't like Leo. Leo was much more ideological. My dad never ran for political office. People had a lot of respect for my dad, but he just didn't do that. I guess maybe because he had five children, and he was tired when he got home and he didn't want to do it, whereas I had one son and one daughter. They both were in high school, about to go to college, when I got involved. I had more free time. That probably had a lot to do with it.

[00:38:05] It sort of rekindled some of the experiences that I had before I came to the union—my days when I was at San Francisco State, my time in the Black Panther Party. Even though I had that somewhat hiatus when I was working for the mayor in Newark, I wasn't involved in radical politics as such, but I was taking the radical politics that I had learned and I was applying it to real-world situations.

[00:38:37] So, I got involved with that, and I liked it. I worked with Rich Cavalli out of Local 34. David Stewart. I worked with people who were—Margaret Pryor, who was a member of the BART Board, as I remember. Her husband had been a longshoreman but he had passed away.

[00:39:06] These were the kinds of things that William "Bill" Chester did in terms of asserting the ILWU's influence beyond the hiring hall. It was Democratic politics, and despite my thoughts about the Democratic Party now, at the same time, I understood that all politics were local, so we would struggle around things. And I always thought that I represented a more leftist perspective.

[00:39:45] I can remember getting some pushback from some of those who were part of the Democratic machine, who looked at me with some suspicion. [laughing] But all I was simply doing was carrying out the line and holding people accountable. We used to do interviews with candidates and we'd ask them questions based upon the issues that Local 10 and the Northern California District Council was concerned about. That was important.

[00:40:28] **HARVEY:** A while back, you started saying, "I ran for office."

[00:40:31] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, I finally did. After Jolita had served, and had done well, I was able to put together my own vision of what I thought that I could contribute to the office. When you've done things prior to becoming an officer, these are things that you can point to.

[00:41:04] For example, building community labor relations. Working in the community. Adhering to the philosophy of bottom up, not top down. Because when you're a rank-and-filer, you're not in a position of power yet, but you've got something that you can point to. I could see I'd been doing some things, and I know some things. I don't know everything, but I've got a track record now.

[00:41:37] But Leo was certainly encouraging me. But he wasn't just encouraging me, he was encouraging a lot of young people. Leo explained to me, he said, "Every politician in Local 10 has always been one that looked to

see who their opposition was going to be down the road. Every politician does that. Local 10 is not any different."

[00:42:07] He was very supportive of young people, and he always had his eye out on people. He was active in the Stewards Council, the Executive Board, and he kept his ear close to the ground. People who didn't even agree with Leo's politics talked to him, because if there was something that they didn't like, and they didn't feel comfortable going to the mic, they knew they could tell Leo about it, and Leo would go to the mic and discuss it. Even though people did not share his politics, they respected him, and they thought he had integrity, which he did.

[00:42:55] Jolita, the first Black woman, he had everything to do with that. He talked to the 63 men and others. He said, "Yeah, she can do this." It wasn't so much that he was knocking Bill, but he was saying, like I said before, "There's two kinds of leadership, tested and untested. You've seen what Bill can do. We need to make use of these young people who have the energy and the imagination. We need to expand."

[00:43:27] That got me to run. I ran. When you start dealing with challenging the Bill Watkins and the Larry Wings and the people who've been there for a long time, people who smiled at you and spoke to you, now, they don't smile as much at you now. [laughing] There's always a whispering campaign that goes on in Local 10, which is really quite powerful. But I got votes from enough old-timers who said, "Yeah, let's give Thomas a chance. I knew his dad."

[00:44:06] **HARVEY:** There were certain things you did in office. There was a lockout. There was Josh Williams.

[00:44:15] **CLARENCE:** Ah, yes, Harvey. It was trial by fire. That was a very interesting period. I got thrown right into it. It was my first term in office. Henry Graham was the president, I do believe—Hammerin' Hank, as they called him. There was nobody else like Henry Graham.

[00:44:50] I kind of welcomed all of that. I remember quite fondly the International did a pretty damn good job. I give them credit. This is one of the things that I really respected, and it really resonated with me. They put out these talking points about the things that we should say as it relates to the Bush administration getting involved in our contract negotiations.

[00:45:19] I can remember so well that the head of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge—you remember the phone call that he made to the leadership, telling them, "We need to keep the ports open. No strikes," and all this stuff. Kind of insinuating that if we didn't tow the line that the military—although they didn't say that in so many words, that's really what you had. And I likened that—I said, "That's almost like J. Edgar Hoover making a phone call to Harry Bridges during the contract negotiations." How outrageous is it that you're calling up and telling us how important it is that we keep the ports open?

[00:46:06] Let me just say this. I used to do briefings on KPFA about the status of the contract negotiations, as best I could. I don't know how much the leadership liked it, but I thought it was important for the community to get a sense of what was going on. I wasn't in the room with the negotiations, but I was getting reports.

[00:46:36] If you remember, Harvey, things got so bad that the AFL-CIO had to send a team out at the negotiating table because we were taking a beating. The employer was putting out all kinds of lies, saying that

we were making as much money as professional baseball players. The leadership was very, very sensitive about even discussing how much money longshore workers made.

[00:47:05] Because of my involvement with working in the community with regards to issues such as the high incidence of asthma that affect absenteeism for children, how a number of our longshore workers had left the industry with asbestosis and other illnesses, I talked about that. I said, "Hey, I'm getting sick and tired about the employer talking about how much money we make. Every nickel we make, we earn. So many of us, when we leave the industry, we have some kind of health issue that we have incurred because of the work that we do."

[00:47:45] It may not have been the line of the leadership, but I thought it was important for me. I was an officer in Local 10. All I was doing as secretary-treasurer was reporting on what was going on. That was something that I thought my political training and involvement with the union allowed me to be, because I didn't ask for their permission to do this on the radio. David Bacon had a show. He said, "Could you come on?" All of what I was basically saying is what the talking points were, and what we were hearing.

[00:48:23] Anyway, Harvey, to make a long story short, I was confronted with some things, such as having to be responsible for implementing a strike fund. Every member was required to contribute $500 to build up our strike fund, getting prepared for one. There's always a lot of complaining, and I said, "Listen." So, the secretary-treasurer, you're the front man out there. [laughing] They don't want to pay it and I said, "You've got to pay it."

[00:49:00] When we were locked out, we still worked passenger vessels. So, as the secretary-treasurer, I was responsible for making sure that longshore linemen got paid, even though we were locked out. I had to make sure that this could happen. It was really quite challenging. It was an exciting period.

[00:49:27] I also had a chance to see the labor solidarity that was expressed. Jimmy Hoffa, Jr.—he don't like to be called Junior, but James Hoffa—came out to our negotiations and sat at the big table and told the employers, "If there is a picket line, we're not crossing it."

[00:49:53] He spoke at the Seafarers area, and we had a wonderful rally there. At the time, the Bush administration was really wrapping up this whole thing about port security and trying to use 9-1-1 as an entree to be able to put port workers under greater surveillance, much like the old-timers saw in the 1950s with the Coast Guard Act.

[00:50:33] All of these things were happening, and I was responding. Local 10 was responding to these things. It was a very exciting period, and I had a chance to do things other than what secretary-treasurers do. [laughing] Dealing with things like promotions.

[00:50:59] **HARVEY:** You mentioned at this time that you helped resuscitate the Drill Team under Josh Williams.

[00:51:06] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, Josh had come to me and explained, "Clarence, we really need the Drill Team." I was secretary-treasurer at the time. He submitted a budget, and I brought that to the Board of Trustees and they voted it up.

[00:51:27] I can tell you, they were great ambassadors for the union. Probably one of the fondest memories I have with the Drill Team, there was a big antiwar demonstration that took place in 2002. It was at the White House. The Drill Team had their hooks in everything. Of course, we had taken a position—"we" meaning the local—against the war, so we went there.

[00:52:03] It was a big, big crowd—not as much as the Million Man March, but it was a big crowd there. The Drill Team was there. They were so proud to be there. And everybody who attended had a chance to see the Drill Team in action. I'm glad that I had some small role to play in that. It just built up after that.

[00:52:26] I had a great deal of affection for Josh. He had that towards me because I listened, and I understood the importance of it, because the Drill Team lifted the spirits of everyone. It was hard to say anything bad about the Drill Team.

[00:52:47] I was really glad to see how the Drill Team incorporated women. It was multi-ethnic. It really gave young people, who were coming in as casuals and as B people, something to really get involved in other than perhaps just the Stewards Council meetings. It was just great, and I was glad to be a part of that.

[00:53:18] **HARVEY:** It's always a stirring experience to see them.

[00:53:20] **CLARENCE:** Oh, yeah. Always.

[00:53:23] **HARVEY:** Remember the big march in San Francisco about the same time—huge march—against the coming war, against Bush's war?

[00:53:31] **CLARENCE:** Yes, yes.

[00:53:32] **HARVEY:** The Drill Team was out in front in San Francisco.

[00:53:34] **CLARENCE:** Out in front, and that organization symbolized the militancy of the ILWU. It was undeniable.

[00:53:44] Also, I'd like to tell a quick story if I might. I can remember that there were some forces in Local 10 that really wanted to have some kind of a demonstration against the Pacific Maritime Association. This was probably before the lockout, I think. You may remember this, Harvey. We marched down California Street where the PMA office used to be.

[00:54:15] **HARVEY:** I remember that march. I joined it.

[00:54:17] **CLARENCE:** Let me just tell you this. Local 10 had brought to the caucus having a march because this was a way of building up support. I had talked about how important this would be. There was a California State Labor Federation convention at the same time that we were proposing this. We said, "We'll get them to come out and march with us."

[00:54:50] But I can remember there were some people who were against this. When I say people against this, they were folks from the Pacific Northwest, I believe, and they were saying things like, "Well, suppose we get a

settlement?" They were speaking as if we were close, and we were not close at all. They said, "What do we do if we get a settlement before this march that you're talking about takes place?" I said, "If we get a settlement, we're still going to march. We'll call it a victory march." People laughed, but I said, "We're going to march either way it goes."

[00:55:32] The resolution passed, and we did have a march, and it was quite spectacular, I might add. The Drill Team and the leadership were all there.

[00:55:48] The second little story that I'd like to tell about the lockout—you're going to find this really hilarious—some of our comrades that I had met in our actions with the Coalition for Accountable Ports said, "Clarence, we know you guys have been locked out. We have an idea." I said, "What's that?" "We want to lock the employers in so they can't get out the building." [laughing]

[00:56:25] They said, "We want to talk to you first to convey to the leadership of the various unions, is this something?" And when I broached the subject, they said, "Clarence, listen, you handle that. It sounds like a great idea. We don't have to get involved."

[00:56:46] I went back and told them. I said, "Green light." They locked the employers in. They chained themselves to the doors. Before they did it, they said, "We're concerned, Clarence, that the police are going to do things to us." I said, "You don't have to worry about that. In my interactions with the Police Department in San Francisco when I used to have to do down to get permits for rallies and all that sort of thing, I never will forget how much I'd be confronted with people saying, "Oh, my grandfather was a longshoreman," or "My great-grandfather was a part of the 1934 strike." "I have relatives that are longshore workers."

[00:57:34] I said, "I can't guarantee, but I don't think the police are going to be beating up on you because that would not be a very wise move on their part right now." That's all I could tell them. I don't have any influence over the police.

[00:57:51] But let me tell you what happened when the police arrived. They said, "What do you want us to do?" when the PMA said, "You've got to do something!" The police took their sweet time. [laughing] It actually went on for hours. The fire department was finally called in and they cut the chains and all this stuff. Very successful action. Very successful.

[00:58:22] I just think about how the relationships that were built up over the years with other activities, where people trusted and believed in us, and they wanted to do something. "We want to lock 'em in." And we did.

[00:58:41] **HARVEY:** Clarence, you refer to them as comrades. Were these folks ILWU guys?

[00:58:45] **CLARENCE:** No, they were not ILWU people.

[00:58:47] **HARVEY:** Who were they?

[00:58:53] **CLARENCE:** Most of them were environmentalists. Some were even from the building trades, but they were people who we had built up a relationship with. They came to me and said, "We want to do this. This is a way for us to show our solidarity with the ILWU."

[00:59:14] And they did, and it worked, and it made a point. It really demonstrated the importance of the ILWU's reputation in the community. People know what we've done. They know our history. So, that happened.

[00:59:38] If I may, Harvey, I want to talk about the antiwar stuff, unless you wanted to ask me another question. You want to move on, or do you want to go?

[00:59:54] **HARVEY:** Developing socialist politics. You talked about that already, I think. Is there anything more about that?

[01:00:01] **CLARENCE:** About Leo?

[01:00:04] **HARVEY:** About developing your own socialist politics, regarding Leo, regarding Jack Heyman. People like that.

[01:00:12] **CLARENCE:** Okay. That kind of ties into what I'm about to talk about when I wanted to talk about the antiwar stuff.

[01:00:25] I really never did talk about socialism a lot when I came to Local 10. I was introduced to it really when I was at San Francisco State and when I was in the Black Panther Party. I'd done a lot of reading. Political education was a real big deal with the Panthers and the Black Student Union. And we talked about the San Francisco State strike.

[01:00:51] But when I got to Local 10, I think that I had begun to really understand the politics of the ILWU and its history. Harvey, I would be remiss if I didn't mention this really quickly.

[01:01:10] Probably one of the most memorable things that happened to me in 2001 is the Harry Bridges memorial celebration of his 100th year anniversary. I was the chair of that committee and I emceed the program at Local 10. That was a great honor.

[01:01:34] I'll never forget that Nicky Bridges, his widow—he went on to marry him—Flynn, from the PMA, she left me a card and she said, "Clarence, I want to thank you for the program." I know that Robbie Bridges, Harry's son, was there. Katherine Bridges Wiggins. So, family members were there. You probably were there, too, Harvey.

[01:02:06] **HARVEY:** Oh, yeah.

[01:02:07] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, it was a big thing.

[01:02:09] **HARVEY:** We marched at the Embarcadero.

[01:02:10] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, it was really something. Of course, you had all of the politicians, like Willie Brown and Nancy Pelosi and all of those people. That's another matter.

[01:02:22] But I was really honored to be in that position. Henry asked me to emcee the program. I never will forget, he came up to me—and when you're chairing something, you've got all of the people speaking, and you

don't want to entertain—and he says, "Herb Mills is here, Clarence. Herb's got to say something. You've got to let Herb speak." [laughing] I really wasn't all that familiar with Herb at that time, but I became more familiar with him later.

[01:02:53] But it was a great activity. I was so proud to be a part of that. I kept this [laughing] as a memento of that occasion. [Holds up an invitation to the memorial.] It was very, very meaningful.

[01:03:07] I started, I guess to really understand what the founders of the ILWU were about. These were men who believed in socialism. They believed in democracy. They were anti-racist. I'm not saying everybody was, but the leadership was, and I had a chance to really understand and embrace that when I started to study the 1934 strike, and the relationship that they had with people like C. L. Dellums—who was the vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters—and the role that he had in assisting Bridges and Henry Schmidt and others—the other leftists, some were Marxist-Leninists, others were influenced by the IWW—with various tendencies.

[01:04:08] **HARVEY:** Conor, you can show picture three.

[01:04:11] **CLARENCE:** Yeah. C. L. Dellumns.

[01:04:42] **HARVEY:** Yeah. It relates to what you were saying.

[01:04:44] **CLARENCE:** I appreciate that very much. That makes it visible for people to see. He was Ron Dellums's uncle. Ron Dellums, a former member of Congress for many years representing Alameda County.

[01:05:01] Also, Ron Dellums's father was a longshore worker. That's important to remember. But C. L. was the person who really supported the idea of Black people being members of the union. He developed a relationship with Bridges, and he was helpful for Bridges to be able to go to the Black churches and to make an appeal to the Black community about not crossing that picket line.

[01:05:29] **HARVEY:** This was in 34?

[01:05:30] **CLARENCE:** This was in 1934, yeah. And this was a moment in labor history that deserves much more attention. I know that Peter Cole has done so. I know I've attempted to do so in my publications. It's very important to understand these lessons.

[01:05:53] That created a greater understanding of what my belief systems are.

[01:06:06] **HARVEY:** In that picture, you're shaking hands with Dellums.

[01:06:08] **CLARENCE:** Shaking hands with Dellums, yeah. That was done in front of City Hall prior to Dellums running for office.

[01:06:19] Very quickly, I'd say this. I said that Leo Robinson and Ron Dellums and myself went to the same high school, Oakland Technical High School. That's a coincidence. All of our fathers were longshore

workers—members of Local 10—and I just think that that had a lot to do with what we eventually did with our own lives. I believe that very strongly.

[01:06:51] Leo and Dellums were at Oakland Tech at the same time. I don't know how close friends they were—they knew one another—but both of their fathers had come into the union in the 1940s that my grandfather came in at the time.

[01:07:10] But in terms of really embracing and understanding socialism, I think all we have to look at is the way that the old-timers constructed the low-man-out system in terms of the dispatch in the early years to ensure democracy in terms of ending the shape-up. For those who don't understand what the shape-up was, longshoremen used to have to be picked and chosen to work for jobs. It was based upon nepotism and ethnicity, kickbacks, and a bunch of corrupt stuff, [run by] these bosses who had allegiance to the company and not to the men. It was very degrading.

[01:08:06] So, one of the demands of the 1934 strike was the end of the shape-up and the implementation of a hiring hall, where, in fact, the workers would be responsible for the dispatching of jobs in a democratic and non-corrupt fashion.

[01:08:29] Then you begin to find out what these men believed in to their core. To be honest with you, Harvey, I kind of like the idea that they didn't necessarily go around talking about "We're socialists." They were just about demonstrating it. I imagine there were some who were more ideological than others.

[01:08:55] **HARVEY:** Harry was not reticent.

[01:09:01] **CLARENCE:** Let me just say this, Harvey. I think that real revolutionaries, they don't always have that on their chests. They implement it and do it by the things that they do. People will find out your politics sooner or later, but what people will say, "I know him, not because he calls himself a socialist, but he worked on this campaign with me," or "She worked on that campaign. We were able to get this done." So, people respect you and have a sense of affection for you, not because you call yourself something, but it's because of what your social practice is.

[01:09:46] There's one thing about being an armchair revolutionary and really being one, and I learned that very early on in my political career when I was active in the Panthers and the Black Student Union. [There were] people who were more theoretical than those who are actually involved with political activities.

[01:10:06] **HARVEY:** It might be interesting to note, since we're talking about Dellums, one of the recent collection highlights of the Labor Archives at [the University of] Washington is that the A. Philip Randolph Institute of Seattle, a local chapter of the AFL-CIO, a group representing Black trade unionists, their records have recently—about a year or so ago—been collected by the University of Washington office, that is to say, Conor Casey's office. It's interesting that they collected things like that.

[01:10:50] I was going to ask you. Some more things on the list that kind of relate to you directly. Million Worker March of October, 2004 in Washington, D.C. There's a picture number six of that. What was your involvement in that? Maybe you can describe what you did about that? Picture five.

[01:11:19] **CLARENCE:** My involvement with that was that I was one of the organizers. Yeah, here we go. To the right, you see Leo Robinson—he's to my left—and myself.

[01:11:39] **HARVEY:** This is 1995. We're looking for picture number six.

[01:11:42] **CLARENCE:** Yeah, six. That photo that you're looking at, the Millions More March, this was—in 2004, we did the Million Worker March. In 2005, it was the tenth anniversary of the Million Man March. The Million Worker March met with minister Louis Farrakhan, the head of the Nation of Islam. We met with him to discuss labor having participation at the tenth anniversary of the Million Man March. If you remember, I went to the Million Man March, and I said there was no labor on the stage.

[01:12:26] In 2005, Chris Silvera, head of the Teamsters National Black Caucus, a woman by the name of Pat Ford was the former executive vice president of SEIU, and myself—we all spoke at the Million Man March tenth anniversary.

[01:12:44] I'm glad you brought up the Million Worker March, Harvey, because that was a very pivotal historical action on the part of the ILWU. It was initiated by Local 10. It initially had the support of the Longshore Caucus, but subsequently, that changed, and it's important to explain why.

[01:13:09] The AFL-CIO was against the Million Worker March in principle because they thought that it was a distraction to anybody but Bush—John Kerry winning the White House. They thought it was a distraction. They put out an edict. It was a statement from a woman named Marilyn Sneiderman, who was out of the field operations for the AFL-CIO saying, "Don't devote any money, don't devote any support, for the Million Worker March."

[01:13:50] Then they had a caveat. "While we may agree with many of its aims and goals"—and those aims and goals were such things as universal healthcare, the right for workers to organize, ending the war in Iraq, ending corporate greed, ending Taft-Hartley—these were some of the demands that we had—they wanted to pay lip service, but there's something more important that happened.

[01:14:19] In 2004, right before the Democratic Convention—the weekend before the start of the convention in Boston—Senator Edward Kennedy had a meeting of trade union leaders. Our own Jim Spinosa was there. James Hoffa was there. Andy Stern was there. Sweeney was there.

[01:14:42] The subject of the Million Worker March came up. I learned about this meeting from our own James Spinosa, who was the International president. He told me about the meeting, to his credit. But he also told me, "The Million Worker March came up and people thought it was a good idea, but it was the wrong time."

[01:15:08] Based upon that meeting before the convention started, Brother Spinosa decided that they weren't going to devote any money. We didn't get a dime from my international executive board to be able to have any money for this.

[01:15:29] Let me just say this. I think that one of the reasons why the response was as it was from the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party was because they knew full well that John Kerry was running a Wall Street campaign. He was not even paying lip service to labor. As a matter of fact, the only thing he was saying was

that no one could do the grassroots work like the AFL-CIO could. He was praising our ability to go out and knock on doors and do this sort of thing.

[01:16:06] The only thing that I would say is that Brother Leo Robinson, one of his points was that he did not want to see any elected officials on the podium that day when we did the Million Worker March because he said that the Democratic Party's interest and the interest of the working class are not one and the same. This was our day to put forward our agenda.

[01:16:33] Now, talk about something extraordinary taking place. I can remember Local 19 had adopted a motion to give $500 to the Million Worker March. Gabriel Prawl was a member. He's now the header-upper of the APRI in Seattle and former president of Local 52.

[01:16:59] He invited Leo to come up to speak to the membership in Local 19. Leo told the members, "I couldn't stop the Million Worker March even if I wanted to because we had all kinds of support all over this country, from Noam Chomsky to Coretta Scott King, Dick Gregory, Martin Luther King III, Howard Zinn." The progressives were really behind us.

[01:17:28] When Leo got through speaking, a rank-and-filer—a white rank-and-filer, by the way—got up and made a motion that the union give $5,000. [laughing] So, Local 19 gave $5,000. That was the most we got out of any ILWU local, aside from Local 10.

[01:17:47] We got $10,000 from the Teamsters, which was interesting. But Leo Robinson—who used to always say that the power of the rank-and-file resides in his back pocket, and he'd pull his wallet out—none of us had any idea that he was going to wind up contributing $50,000 of his own money for that march. I don't have to show you the t-shirt because you've been showing it on the screen.

[01:18:25] That money went to purchase t-shirts, buttons, pins. It was really an extraordinary gesture, but I can tell you one thing. The way the Million Worker March got started—very quickly—Trent Willis, who was a second- or third-generation longshore worker, is the current president of Local 10. One of the things he didn't tell me until years later, his mother suggested to him that there ought to be a Million Worker March. I thought it was Trent's idea.

[01:18:56] He called me one day after a union meeting. Having been to the Million Man March, Trent said, "I got this idea for a Million Worker March, Clarence." And all I could think about was the grandeur, and how large the Million Man March was. Not being one to pour water on an idea, or discourage someone, I said, "Let me call Leo."

[01:19:22] We had a meeting at my home right after that and we discussed it. Believe it or not, I had a document that I got from a Labor Council meeting about Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his—was it the Human Rights Campaign? He was calling for national healthcare and a number of other things in the 40s, and I had this on my table.

[01:19:57] I'm looking at these things. We started looking at it and we said, "This could be the basis for the Million Worker March. These demands."

[01:20:06] Leo, having been a member of the Communist Party, was thinking, how do we get this thing off the ground before people start redbaiting us? So, we included things, like we quoted Franklin Delano Roosevelt. We put the focus—because Leo would say, "No matter if a person is a Republican, a Democrat, a leftie or whatever, there are certain things that all workers can embrace—the right to organize; a national living wage; pensions; public education; Social Security. These are core values of workers."

[01:20:51] And he's right. No question about that. But make no mistake about it, the AFL-CIO and the Democratic Party understood what this was, and they were not about to embrace these things at all.

[01:21:09] Harvey, very quickly, I had gone to Baghdad in 2003 as part of the international delegation to meet with the Iraqi trade unionists there, and to give a report back on what was happening under the occupation. This really created a greater understanding of what this war was about.

[01:21:36] If you remember, Harvey, a few weeks after the war, the Port of Umm Qasr was turned over to SSA, and SSA was giving us a hell of a time at the bargaining table, as we have talked so often, in 2001. All of these dots are connected, because we had a lot of people who were involved.

[01:22:02] You wanna talk about May Day right now? [laughing]

[01:22:04] **HARVEY:** Sure. May Day contract year, yeah. Wait a minute. You want May Day 2005 or you want—

[01:22:15] **CLARENCE:** Let's do that one first. One of the things, Harvey, that came out of the Million Worker March is that we said—yes, that's me in New York City. I was in Cuba in 2009 with Dave Arian on May Day, but that's another subject.

[01:22:39] Here we are in Union Square in New York City, I believe. Here's what happened, Harvey. At the conclusion of the Million Worker March, on the next day, we said, "What is it we want to do? And keep it simple."

[01:22:54] Two things. We wanted to reclaim May Day and International Working Women's Day. The reason for May Day is because of how it's been hidden, and how it is so much connected with our history in terms of the development of unions in this country.

[01:23:18] So, that was the whole idea as to why to do it, and it really mirrored so much a part of our own ILWU history. I don't have to go through all the particulars of 1886 and the Haymarket. People can do this on their own. But suffice it to say that ILWU Local 10, I would venture to say with confidence, has probably done more in the U.S. labor movement to reclaim May Day than anyone else.

[01:23:52] In 2005, right after the Million Worker March, in San Francisco, Trent Willis, Keith Shanklin and others had a May Day action in San Francisco. I was involved in one in New York City.

[01:24:10] But it culminated in 2008, during the contract negotiations for the ILWU, where a resolution was written. I believe the resolution was written by Jack Heyman. It was called No Peace, No Work. It passed the Executive Board, the membership, and then it went on to the caucus.

[01:24:37] I have to tell you, Harvey, that that was a learning experience for me in this regard. Jack Heyman and Trent Willis, a number of us, even—I'm thinking about the brother who was a coast committeeman from the Pacific Northwest when Spinosa was in power. His name will come to me in a moment. We'll move on right now.

[01:25:11] But there were people who were against the war. May Day was about calling for an eight-hour no-work protest of the Iraq War and the war in Afghanistan—that was the basis—and doing it in contract negotiations on International Workers' Day.

[01:25:36] My point is when we got to the caucus, I, along with others, had talked about May Day and also opposing the war in Iraq. We had resolutions regarding both things that had been voted down in previous years. But over the years, people got a little bit tired of waiting for the Democratic Party to get off their behinds and do something.

[01:26:06] I can remember so well Lawrence Thibodeaux introduced the resolution at the caucus in 2008. Much to my surprise, people who had been against taking any action against the war got up, and said they were tired, and they were ready to do something, and they got up and spoke in favor of May Day.

[01:26:37] The lesson that I learned from that, Harvey, was this. All of the work that those of us who had been opposing—and it wasn't just people in Local 10, it was others, but we were in the minority. Over the years, the message became clear.

[01:26:53] Ironically, I did not have to say very much that day about speaking in favor of it. I did, and I realized that there was no need for me to. Others were saying the things that I had been saying over the years. Different voices were now speaking, and it became very clear to the leadership that this was something that was going to pass. It did not pass unanimously, but an overwhelming majority of people.

[01:27:24] They did not allow those who said, "We can't do it because it was a contract year." They didn't buy that. They said, "Now is the time."

[01:27:34] The employer was very belligerent to Bob. They wanted him to take information down off of our Website. "We want you to send out emails and text messages telling people to cease and desist. We're going to take you to the NLRB." And they did take us to the NLRB, but we went through with it anyway.

[01:27:56] I was very proud of the union because we had pushback, even from the leadership. I just think that there was an ideological difference between [?Bob and Spinner?] and those of us in Local 10 specifically about what I would call the difference between rank-and-file social justice unionism versus what I would call business unionism, where the whole idea of what is perceived as being the collaboration between the employer and the bosses around certain issues.

[01:28:38] Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about. If you remember, during, I think it was the contract negotiation of 2015, where you saw Bob and [James] McKenna, who were doing these discussions, or speaking about the contract—that was the year, I believe, that we had a contract extension. That was the first time that we ever had a contract extension for a number of years, if you remember that.

[01:29:19] They were speaking. They both had received Connie Award for promoting the use of containers. That was in the Journal of Commerce. You would have never have seen anything like that with Harry Bridges, where there would have been anything with the employer.

[01:29:39] I guess the closest thing we could say where that happened was when Harry Bridges was up on trial in the 40s—you remember this, Harvey—and the employers spoke on his behalf as character witnesses during one of his trials. They said that if Bridges goes to prison, there would be chaos on the waterfront. [laughing] And Harry said, "Little did I know that I ever would think that the employers would be speaking on my behalf. I certainly did not ask them."

[01:30:13] **HARVEY:** Yeah, but he engaged in Mechanization and Modernization. The M&M Agreement allowed for containerization to come in, and he called it class collaboration himself.

[01:30:25] **CLARENCE:** Yes, and if you would ask me what it really means, I think that things like the Million Worker March, things like May Day, things like Block the Boat, matters like Juneteenth—these were all rank-and-file actions that emanated from Local 10. I'm proud of that because I think that's part of the radical tradition. It's no secret a number of people still to this day say Local 10 is the most militant, and others have said the social conscience of the ILWU.

[01:31:12] Having said that, I would just say that the May Day action, I'm very proud of that. I'm glad that people who were reluctant to embrace it in the beginning did eventually embrace it and support it and saw it for what it was. It was quite something, and I'm glad that we were able to get that done.

[01:31:41] We received accolades from the Federation of Labor in Iraq about that. They even took an action themselves when they were threatened with all kinds of threats by the government and the military. They took an action for one hour in solidarity with the ILWU.

[01:32:03] But, yeah, Harvey, that was a very important historical event. In 2008, the employer did take us to the NLRB. They subsequently dropped it. [laughing]

[01:32:21] **HARVEY:** Clarence, let me ask you. Did you have any concern that it would look like you were kind of taking authority away from the negotiating committee during negotiations, and weakening their position? Did you have any thoughts about that?

[01:32:36] **CLARENCE:** You know what? To be perfectly honest with you, no. The reason why I did not is because I believed—with a number of us in Local 10—that the Longshore Caucus was the highest ruling body of the Longshore Division, and that the employer knows that as well.

[01:33:03] Let me just point something out to you, Harvey, that I think is important for people to know. This is something that I found out when I was working on the campaign for May Day. I came across a 1999 press release from the PMA, and this is what they were saying. "We are agreeing with the ILWU for it to have its stop-work union meeting coast-wide April 1999 in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal. That's independent of us. This is what the union wants, and we're agreeing to it."

[01:33:56] What that demonstrated to me and the rank-and-file is that the ILWU Longshore Division presented something—a proposal—to the PMA regarding May Day, and they rejected it. They didn't have to reject that.

They could have went on and agreed to it. So, we understood that they also respected the wishes of the ILWU Longshore Caucus as well. So, no, that did not bother me at all.

[01:34:30] You want to know one thing, Harvey, that was rather ironic out of all of this? I never will forget this: After we did May Day, and we had a spring caucus, I never will forget—oh, my gosh, what is his name? The two coast committeemen, one from the Pacific Northwest and one from southern California. The one from southern California was the predecessor to Brother [Frank] Ponce De Leon. What is his name? The Latino brother from LA.

[01:35:12] **HARVEY:** Yeah. You want me to look it up?

[01:35:17] **CLARENCE:** Can you cut it off for a second? Yeah.

[01:36:17] [Clarence and Harvey look up the name.]

[01:36:17] **HARVEY:** Ray Ortiz?

[01:36:19] **CLARENCE:** Ray Ortiz! Don't tell Ray I forget his name! [laughing]

[01:36:23] **HARVEY:** Sure. And Leo Sundet was committeeman at that time, apparently, too.

[01:36:29] **CLARENCE:** Yes. And who was the guy who preceded Sundet? He was a real sharp guy.

[01:36:36] **HARVEY:** Yeah, I know who you mean.

[01:36:39] **CLARENCE:** Joe Wenzel.

[01:36:41] **HARVEY:** Joe Wenzel, yeah.

[01:36:43] **CLARENCE:** But let me tell you. Ray Ortiz got up and spoke. He was one of the first guys to report about May Day, and this is what Ray said—and I never will forget it. Ray said that the employers conveyed to him at the table "We didn't think you could do it." Meaning that he questioned whether or not the coasts would go out.

[01:37:14] The other thing that I thought was the most significant thing that Ray said. You can go back and check the minutes. Ray said that the whole tenor of the contract negotiations changed after we did May Day. I have no doubt that that had to do with rank-and-file solidarity.

[01:37:39] And I can tell you right now, from my point of view—I can't speak for Jack Heyman and I can't speak for Trent—but let me just say this, from my point of view, we did not do May Day with that in mind. In other words, I'm not saying we thought about doing May Day to gain an advantage at the table, but it goes without saying when there's rank-and-file solidarity, the employers always back down. They do.

[01:38:09] I hadn't seen that document about the ILWU supporting the coast-wide shutdown for Mumia Abu-Jamal, but when I read that, I said, "Huh. They went for it in 1999, and now they're not going to go for it

now?" We're asking them, like we did. They can adjust their schedules. But their position was, "Hell, no." They were taking a hard line.

[01:38:38] So, when you asked me the question whether I was concerned about that, no, I was not. Then they did back down. They dropped that charge. But I never will forget Ray Ortiz getting up and talking about that. He even said, "I want to thank Local 10." I thought to myself, that was just collateral damage.

[01:39:02] But that's what happens when you stand up and show rank-and-file solidarity. The employers will back down every time. We have other examples of that, Harvey, to show. I don't know how much time we have left, but I think it's important to say that it happened in 2020, Harvey, with the issue of Juneteenth.

[01:39:25] I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but there was a teleconferencing call involving all of the presidents of the various ILWU locals up and down the coast. ILWU Local 10 had initiated a resolution calling for Juneteenth—June 19, 2020—that all of the ports be shut down for eight hours. I was very encouraged to find out that presidents from all of the locals stood in solidarity and said, "Yes."

[01:40:03] The president of Local 10, Willie Adams, had reported to those on the call that he had already approached the PMA about this. They came back with a counter offer of doing it on June 14. The presidents were insulted.

[01:40:23] **HARVEY:** Willie Adams was the International president by that time.

[01:40:29] **CLARENCE:** Yes, I'm sorry. In 2020, he had come back with a counter proposal from the employers. They said no to June 19. You could have the 14th.

[01:40:46] I wasn't on the call, but I got a report from those who were. The longshoremen said, "That's a Sunday overtime thing, and we asked for the 19th." They rejected that. What did the employer do? They acquiesced, put out a statement to their customers saying, "There will be no movement of cargo for eight hours on June 19." They backed down again.

[01:41:19] I think it's also important to mention, Harvey, there weren't any lawsuits from anybody regarding this recent—

[01:41:31] I would also like to throw out that it's important to mention that with Block the Boat, nobody sued the ILWU. That did not take place. No one sued the ILWU during Occupy. I was a part of both of these struggles, and EGT was involved with that, but it was also Occupy. No one got sued.

[01:41:59] **HARVEY:** What was your involvement during Occupy?

[01:42:01] **CLARENCE:** Ah! Let me explain that. It's important to mention that Bob McEllrath, James Hoffa—a number of international presidents had come out and spoke highly of Occupy, speaking against the One Percent. Bob put out a wonderful statement about that.

[01:42:29] But what happened is Occupy was invited to speak at Local 10, Oakland. Then we were able to connect the struggle of Occupy with EGT because we saw that as being Wall Street along the

waterfront—Bunge, which is a major agribusiness. So, this was a joint venture of agribusinesses wanting to have an operation [?a mill?] —in Longview and they didn't want longshore workers to be in there.

[01:43:18] What happened, Harvey, was that there was like a coalition that developed—members of Local 10 and others locals. It was not sanctioned by the Longshore Division, which Bob got pissed off about. But we had to remind Bob and the leadership, "Hey, we don't own these ports. We just work here. These ports belong to the public."

[01:43:43] So, people wanted to show their solidarity, and we wanted to also send a message to EGT. That's really how that went down.

[01:43:58] The first action that took place was in November 2011. That was called the general strike, if you might remember. It wasn't a general strike—

[01:44:11] **HARVEY:** Picture 16, please.

[01:44:12] **CLARENCE:** It wasn't a general strike, but it was quite effective. The city of Oakland pretty much shut down. [laughing] I was interviewed, along with Boots Riley, who is a renowned filmmaker from here in Oakland. We did an interview on the issue of Occupy because we took an action that day.

[01:44:47] Let me explain how that went. People marched from the city of downtown Oakland to the port and shut it down. They did that for two reasons. The first reason was they were acting in solidarity. They wanted to show their support to the ILWU because to be quite honest about it, Harvey, Occupy started out as an entity dealing with Wall Street in New York. Then it spread.

[01:45:22] But we in the ILWU Local 10 gave it a clarity, because when we started talking about Wall Street on the waterfront, who are we talking about? We're talking about those entities on the waterfront that have investments for Wall Street. And what we also were talking about was if you really want to strike at capitalism, one of the ways in which you could do it would be to disrupt international cargo movement.

[01:45:58] We learned that lesson from what took place in 1984 with the anti-apartheid struggle and the ILWU. But it goes all the way back, Harvey, to 1935, when Mussolini invaded Ethiopia. There was a demonstration on the waterfront to disrupt that cargo that was going to Italy in 1939, when ILWU did not ship scrap iron to Japan, and President Roosevelt scolded Harry Bridges about staying out of U.S. foreign policy. There was an interview on NPR where Harry told the interviewer that he mentioned to the President that that was our right, that was our privilege, to be able to do such things.

[01:46:55] So, the things that we did in regard to Occupy, I was very clear about these things. I thought that it was necessary. I know that the leadership didn't like it. But on the other hand, I thought the leadership had plausible denial on that. They had nothing to do with that, but they benefited from that. It was something that we embraced. That's just how we saw things.

[01:47:24] I say that because it's important for people to understand that because we're militant, we're not reckless. We're not reckless. I will just demonstrate this to you. Just recently, when the Cape Orlando, which

was the vessel that left the Port of Oakland and went to Tacoma, in order to receive mobile rocket launchers and Humvees and cargo trucks and anti-personnel equipment, that was to be loaded by longshoremen in Tacoma.

[01:48:09] There was a community picket line that formed at that terminal. Forty longshore workers, as I understand it, didn't cross that picket line. The military was forced to go to the waterside of the vessel to board it to load it. All they simply did was to follow the 10 guiding principles of the ILWU. We treat every picket line as if it were our own. And they didn't go to work that day, and they got paid. Nobody got hurt.

[01:48:40] I think that there's something to be said about the ILWU and those traditions. The truth of the matter is there might have been some people who wanted to go to work that day. But you want to know one thing? I'm sure that there were probably a lot of them who didn't want to go to work and make any money that way that day. They may have had qualms about that. But they got paid for the whole day, and that does not typically happen.

[01:49:09] But I do think that it is important for people to understand this is the tradition of the ILWU. This is what we're about. This is the history. This is one of the reasons why, Harvey, a lot of the things that I've been involved with, this is what the old-timers did.

[01:49:31] We can back to what recently happened during the contract negotiations for this last contract, where longshoremen in Local 10 did not take jobs for three whole days. They didn't take jobs. They didn't come to the hall, putting tremendous pressure on the employer. It's my understanding that prompted the Acting Secretary of Labor to come out here and be involved in those negotiations. That's what the old-timers did, and I think that these lessons are so important for young people to learn and understand.

[01:50:18] I'm so grateful to have been a part of this institution. My mother is 95 years old. She has received all of the benefits that a surviving spouse can receive. She doesn't pay a dime for her medical care. I believe in my heart it has a great deal to do for her longevity. I tease her sometimes. I say, "You've been the daughter of a longshoreman, you've been the wife of a longshoreman, and the mother of a longshoreman." She loves the union, and has great respect for it.

[01:50:58] Harry came out and said years ago, "We're left, and we're proud of it. We're radical. Most of the people in the country are workers, and we stand on the side of the working class."

[01:51:15] I think that I, along with Leo Robinson and so many others, have been the beneficiaries. I would say this to you. African Americans in particular hold a deep debt to the ILWU because I think that when we look at the African American workforce here in the Bay Area, it was the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters that represented the most advanced sector of the Black working class before Black people started coming on the waterfront. Then the ILWU Local 10 supplanted that.